

Vincentian Reentry Organizing Project Update

The Vincentian Reentry Organizing Project is a partnership between the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, which is dedicated to reducing poverty through decreasing incarceration and removing barriers to reentry.

How many of us have come across a family in a home visit who has a son or mother or father or somebody else impacted by incarceration? By raising awareness, engaging the Vincentian family and returning citizens in advocacy, we can create opportunity and shrink poverty.



When asked if you knew somebody with a record, nearly the whole room raised their hand.

Through a home visit, you may have heard stories of people unable to find work because of their criminal record. The moment their job application is submitted, it is often quickly discarded because they “checked the box” that says they have a felony conviction. There is no recognition of how old the felony charge is, the track record of redemption and personal progress, or the skills and gifts they bring. This can be discouraging and dejecting. Inspired by our call to see the face of Christ in each person,

many of our local partnerships are beginning to advocate for a more common sense and fair approach to hiring, called Fair Hiring or Ban-the-Box.



Fair Hiring removes the question about arrests and convictions off job applications. This allows people to more fairly compete for a job, and stand out on their own skills and ambition. The background check is done when the employer has narrowed down the applicants. The time of last conviction, a track record of success and rehabilitation, seriousness of offense, and other factors are then taken into consideration. By this

point, job seekers with convictions are seen more fully, more than just a record.



Many city, county, and states have adopted such policies, with broad bipartisan support. Even in the private sector, some employers are changing their hiring practices to be more inclusive and fair. In Wisconsin, Ohio, and Florida, Vincentians are working with returning citizens to advance common sense, fair hiring practices for their cities and states.

Over the last month, the Vincentian Reentry Organizing Project has brought to life Catholic Social Teaching through advocacy and

organizing. This includes promoting Fair Hiring. Take a look at what our team has accomplished:

- In Ohio, over 90 Catholics – mostly Vincentians – have heard stories from returning citizens and the challenges they face. Through these presentations, called Dismas Journeys, people are asked to take an action step to support returning citizens. In Ohio, we are organizing for a statewide Fair Hiring Policy, also known as ban-the-box.



Daytona Beach Mayor Derrick Henry (left) poses with Vincentians and local leaders

- In Florida, over 250 people attended a forum on ban-the-box. This forum included returning citizens, Vincentians from multiple conferences, prison wardens, and even local elected officials including the mayor of Daytona Beach. This forum is the first step in getting Daytona to change their hiring practices to responsibly include returning citizens in the city's workforce.

- Back in Ohio, the Council of St. Vincent de Paul Cincinnati executive director, Liz Carter, joined over 600 people of faith with the AMOS Project in the launch of the Exodus Campaign, a faith rooted movement in Cincinnati to address family poverty. Liz spoke about the scale of poverty in the community. Anthony Rogers and James Delaney offered personal testimony about the challenges facing fathers with criminal records.

- In Wisconsin, the partnership is growing a new team driven by returning citizens, called Ex-Prisoners Organizing (ExPO). This team is bringing together returning citizens from WISDOM, Project Return, and St. Vincent de Paul for leadership training and strategy. Voices of the Poor will be joining ExPO and WISDOM on December 10 as



they together lift up a vision for the 11x15 Campaign for Wisconsin families that seeks to reform a backwards revocation system, harmful overuse of solitary confinement, promote compassionate release, and advance ban-the-box.

- In Massachusetts, the outreach and organizing efforts are taking hold in Worcester and Brockton. In Worcester, there was a recent presentation made at a parish during worship to share about the Vincentian Reentry Organizing Project and the statewide Jobs Not Jails campaign. Catholics and returning citizen leaders with the project worked with Worcester House of Corrections to connect inmates to voting. In Brockton, leaders with the project are organizing a job fair with employers willing to hire formerly incarcerated men and women.
- In Ohio (yes, back to Ohio), over 200 people – mostly Catholic – have signed letters to the Governor of Ohio asking his support for a Statewide Fair Hiring Policy. Another 200 letters have been written to local congress members and Speaker John Boehner seeking their support for the Smarter Sentencing Act and Second Chance Act.



This work is carried out by state organizing in each state. Learn more about our team of talented and dedicated organizers on our website, www.vincentianrestoration.nationbuilder.org

